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ENGLISH PHILOLOGY AND ENGLISH LITERATURE IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES.

IN submitting the following paper to the consideration of scholars and teachers, I wish most earnestly to disclaim any purpose to reflect offensively upon modes of study or instruction in English that may be sanctioned in American universities. No unkindly feeling inspires me; my aims are broad and catholic; it is "the individual" that "withers" and the theme that "is more and more." Nor do I wish to assume the garb of Sir Oracle, or to don the mantle of the prophet. Rational and scientific criticism of my views, however adverse, is not deprecated; on the contrary, it is cordially solicited.

I lay down this comprehensive but explicit proposition, that in the greater number of American universities in which the study of the English language maintains a recognized place, the methods by which the subject is taught and inculcated are seriously if not fatally antagonistic to the development of æsthetic sense, artistic form, or stylistic grace. The originating cause of that notable absence of literary acquirement or literary faculty, which is so marked a characteristic of our American university instruction, is not far to seek, nor difficult to explain. When, some twenty-five years ago, the study of our mother speech began no longer to hide its diminished head, when the Renaissance of English, in the fullness of time and after the lapse of ages, succeeded the Renaissance of the classical tongues, it affected in the main, and continues principally to affect, but one phase of the subject to which it relates. In other words, the revival was upon an almost exclusively philological basis. The brilliant results of comparative investigation were brought to bear upon our grammatical structure by German philologues and their English imitators, and magnificent achievements have been

wrought in that direction, not in Europe alone, but in America, especially by such scholars as have been moulded and fashioned by German environment. It is a labor of supererogation to refer to the work accomplished in this still expanding field by Lounsbury, Cook, Hunt, March, Garnett, Bright, Harrison, Kent, and Primer, whose praise, to modify the apostolic eulogy, is in all the assemblies of the philologists. No one is in more genuine accord with their attitude than the writer, in so far as it implies the legitimate and symmetrical broadening of their sphere of activity; no one has toiled more assiduously to keep himself in line with the advance of this science, in Europe as well as in our own country. The evils which this paper deprecates, and against which it is designed, in the broad and impersonal sense already indicated, to be a protest, do not find their origin or their inspiration in philological study contemplated merely as such, nor in philology when restrained within limits that render it harmonious and symmetrical in its relations to the other culture forces. I reiterate my expression of attachment to the pursuit of philology in its rational sphere. I utter my warning against the subordination and repression of the literary sense by the exclusive devotion to a hard verbal discipline, a cold, fastidious exegesis of language, which is eminently characteristic of university training in the United States.

I have reference especially to conspicuous and leading centres of culture, not to that great and growing multitude of nominal colleges and universities which no man can number. These do not enter into the estimate, as their influence upon the "stream of culture tendency" is scarcely discernible. To be more specific, I will candidly admit that I have especially before my mind's eye those leading institutions which, in large measure, fix and determine the academic type throughout this country. In nearly all American universities of the character and grade represented by those just indicated, the study of English literature in the *highest* and *best* sense holds no recognized place. Harvard should be especially noted in the list of exceptions; long

may it continue to merit this honorable and rare pre-eminence!

To illustrate this almost exclusively philological tendency, one need only glance superficially over the publications of the Modern Language Association and note that portion of the volumes assigned to English. It is an unbroken series of philological minutiae, phonetic analysis, dialectic investigation, stressed or *distressed* vowels, characteristics of Pope's rhymes, laws of alliteration, etc. I may remark in passing that nearly all the essays upon dialectic peculiarities, such as those of Virginia or Tennessee, have stamped upon their face, the condemnation of narrow and restricted investigation, which is wholly at variance with the broad and comparative methods of a rational philology.

The preponderance of philological teaching is not the only charge that must be brought against our universities. Numbers of the alleged dialectic forms of Tennessee, for example, I have been accustomed to hear in other and distant sections of the South from the dawn of conscious memory. The observers have in this, as in other instances, mistaken their own standpoint for the dialectical universe. . . . "the rustic murmur of their bourg for the great wave that echoes round the world." It may be affirmed in addition that such literary training as is accomplished in the typical American university is often disfigured or marred by a strong element of the crochety and the perverse. At times it descends to a degree of puling sentimentality such as might be looked for in the essays of a budding schoolmiss rather than in the system of a matured university instructor. The jejune and feeble endeavors made in this direction, only illustrate more effectually the lack of literary grasp, perception, and acquirement that marks the purely philological votary. I do not think I render myself amenable to the charge of exaggeration or injustice when I affirm that there are scarcely two universities in America in which a comprehensive catholic training in English literature is attainable or possible; such training as serves to develop a perception of beauty of form,

the serene and tempered grace of Sir James Stephen, our own Irving, or the late Henry Reed. Even in cases in which nature has supplied the foundation and has infused the strong propensity, the university training does nothing to nourish or kindle it into objective and symmetrical character. Its tendency, assuredly without design, is to repress or stifle the literary sense by the singular perverseness that marks its teaching. In how many American universities is there a severe critical and exhilarating study of "Lycidas," "Il Penseroso," and its co-mate; of Ward's "English Poets;" of Mark Pattison's editions of Pope and of Milton's Sonnets; of such supreme types of grace and form as "A Dream of Fair Women," "The Palace of Art," or that sovereign creation of the philosophy and literature of our era, "In Memoriam?"

The absence of literary attainment among professed philologists is to be deplored, but their power for evil would be in a degree neutralized if they refrained from entering into literary spheres except in the capacity of learners or disciples. The typical English style of the modern philologue is so pronounced and characteristic, as to be almost worthy of the designation and rank of a special dialect. It may be that in some century now hidden behind a cloud of ages, it will furnish a rich and suggestive field for aspiring investigators of dialectic survivals. The distinctive feature of the elder Renaissance, at least in its Italian phase, was a supreme love of form beauty, in art as in language, though its thought lavished itself upon expression in an ancient, but ancestral tongue. This feature is graphically illustrated in Browning's poem, "The Bishop orders his tomb in St. Praxed's Church," in which the spirit of Bembo and Sadoletto is strikingly exhibited.

It is a point which ought not to be ignored, that even from a purely philological or verbal plane, literary exegesis is by no means destitute of fascination and of charm. The vocabulary of Wordsworth, Browning, and Tennyson is the rarest and richest of philological fields. The creative, as

well as resuscitative vigor displayed in Tennyson's *word-hord* is one of the most suggestive and stimulating phenomena in the strange eventful history of English speech since the process of reintegration and reformation that marked the "spacious times of great Elizabeth;" nor has the chronicle of our tongue exhibited a parallel since that golden day until the epoch in which "Harold," "The Princess," "In Memoriam," and the "Idylls of the King," were added to the long and brilliant procession of its achievements. Yet considerations such as these find no adequate recognition in a scheme of instruction in which the organic unity, catholicity, and harmonious relation that form the master-light of all pure art are fastidiously disregarded and remorselessly cast out.

It may be demanded, perhaps not without reason and equity, that I should illustrate my broad and comprehensive strictures by the citation of special instances and the enumeration of concrete cases. From the mere perusal of university catalogues or programmes one cannot always infer the real condition of instruction in English literature, as such publications are, from their very nature, more or less misleading and deceptive. For this reason I have not availed myself of them. My conclusions are, in the main, the outcome of patient and diligent observation in a variety of capacities and relations, and of a membership, surviving through eight years, in the Modern Language Association of America. For seven seasons I was in charge of the School of English in one of the largest and most widely known of the many summer colleges that have become a characteristic feature of our educational life within the last two decades of its history. Numbers of those with whom I was associated in the position of lecturer were graduates of leading representative institutions in New England and the North. My facilities for accurate observation, it will at once be conceded, were well adapted to the attainment of trustworthy and conclusive results. Lack of acquaintance with our literature, as illustrated in its sovereign achievements, was the normal and

prevailing condition. Teachers, university and collegiate professors, were in liberal measure represented in my daily audiences. My class was a sort of miniature world—an academic microcosm—in so far as it exhibited and portrayed the true and indisputable status of instruction in English literature in American universities during the last decades of this expiring century.

If more specific allegation be demanded, it shall not be veiled from scrutiny or withdrawn from "the pure severity of perfect light." It is a fact of which I have personal knowledge, that young men of rare discrimination, endowed with æsthetic susceptibility, and requiring only delicate guidance for the accomplishment of the purest and noblest ends in certain phases of our catholic and versatile literature, have withdrawn in despondency and in despair from at least one illustrious university shrine, where literary culture or aspiration is not only unmet and uncheered by sympathy, but is scarcely accorded a cold and chilling toleration.

During my own student life at the University of Virginia I cannot recall, in my course of instruction in Latin, a single shadowy reminiscence of æsthetic hint, critical suggestion, culture flavor, or stylistic inspiration. It was a mournful and plaintive round of local relations of prepositions, point reached by motion, object affected by an action, time how long, space how far, the distinction between *sic* and *ita*, *ergo* and *igitur*. Of *argal* I had never heard a dim intimation in those dreary and nostalgic days: as it is employed by both Shakspere and Tennyson, I infer that it has been placed upon the *Index Expurgatorius* of the philologists. Nothing, save my early home environment and my own instinct, preserved me from chaos and disintegration. I survived the ordeal of my university training by a species of literary transcendentalism. In the school of Greek the conditions were more auspicious, as the instructor, then in the white flower of his early manhood, was endowed with a supreme discernment and gift of illumination which age has not withered and even philological brilliance has not eclipsed or

supplanted.¹ The same general criticism holds good in large measure of advanced instruction in our principal universities in the Germanic and Romance languages. The exclusively philological method does not wreak its thought and aggressive energy upon our vernacular alone.

The significant fact may be further noted that in all America English literary study has no recognized and accredited medium. There are journals and journals of philology, its most finely specialized phases have their means of utterance, yet of literature it may be said, without hyperbole and with genuine pathos, that "her voice is not heard," "there is no speech nor language." If by some inadvertence, or by a mere caprice of transient magnanimity, an article or essay tainted by the flavor of literary culture is admitted into the dismal precincts of a professedly philological journal, the suspected guest is subjected to a species of philological quarantine, the danger signal is hoisted, and the orthodox are fervently admonished against the possibility of impending peril.

The views set forth in this article are not in any restrictive or especial sense the mere opinions, nor, above all, the mere whims or idiosyncrasies, of the writer. They are in substantial accord with the familiar utterances and accepted deliverances of the late James Russell Lowell, the Hon. Seth Low, of Columbia College, New York, the Right Hon. James Bryce, and especially are they in perfect harmony with the views enunciated and accentuated by Dr. Hamilton W. Mabie in his address, upon the 22d of February, 1892, to the Johns Hopkins University, that stronghold and sanctuary of philological orthodoxy and conservatism. It is perhaps a work of supererogation to refer to the monograph of Mr. Churton Collins upon the Study of English Literature at the English universities, and it is assuredly the saddest of memories and most ungenial of tasks to recall the example

¹I do not overlook the fact that Greek lends itself much more generously and sympathetically to æsthetic culture than Latin.

of that marvelous historical scholar, so recently gone into the world of light, whose massive energy and catholic range of knowledge were almost completely sacrificed to a narrow, whimsical, intolerant, and remorseless philological pedantry.

For the evils which this paper deplores, and against which it is intended to serve both as a warning and a protest, I can indicate no direct or immediate remedy. The reform must come as the result of precept and example, not by spasmodic or convulsive effort, but as "the kingdom of heaven cometh," without "observation" or outward show. That the reaction will manifest itself I doubt not, but it is to be feared that much evil will be wrought before the incoming of that auspicious day, in the repression or extinction of high æsthetic aims, of keen literary susceptibility, asking only the hand that guides, the hand that scarcely a single American university holds out with cordial sympathy, or even with courteous recognition.¹

HENRY E. SHEPHERD.

College of Charleston.

¹The excellent work accomplished by many of the smaller American colleges did not escape the notice of that cultured and subtle observer, the Right Hon. James Bryce. (See *American Commonwealth*, Vol. II., chapter 101, page 568.) Some of the very best results attained in English especially are achieved by these modest and comparatively unknown seats of learning. I refer specifically to such institutions as are entitled to the name of university—not more than six or seven in all.